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SUBJECT: SECURITY CONCERNS AT JOHANNESBURG INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT

(U) Sensitive But Unclassified. Not for Internet
Distribution.

[11.](#) (SBU) Summary. A spate of recent criminal activity at the Johannesburg International Airport (JIA) reveals a need for improved security. Several robberies, shootings and unauthorized access to restricted areas have resulted in a police investigation. While security precautions at the airport have been elevated, an ACSA official warned of more negative reports on airport security in the short-term. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

[12.](#) (SBU) As background, a senior security executive explained that the JIA's restricted areas where international and domestic aprons are situated and where airplanes are parked can be accessed from several locations:

- One, the Charlie Gate is located near the terminals. This gate controls airport access for airport and airline staff reporting to work.

- Two, the North Gate is used as an entrance and exit point for normal commercial cargo.

- Three, the "Super" South Gate is a multi-lane entrance and exit point used to convey valuable cargo. At this gate a variety of additional security resources are used including x-ray machines, upright metal detectors, handheld metal detectors, and police. This gate also handles traffic that previously traveled via the freight and construction gates mentioned below.

- Four, the ATNS gate used by Air Traffic and Navigation Services employees.

- Five, an unused freight gate with airside access. This was previously padlocked shut, but has now been welded shut.

- Six, an unused construction gate with airside access. This gate was previously padlocked shut, but has now been welded shut.

- Seven, private airline hangars. A controlled access point separates these hangars from the airport's airside. An unpatrolled fence separates this area from public roads.

- Eight, SAA Technical, a subsidiary of South African Airways, maintains, repairs, and tests airplanes. It has a controlled access point separating them from the runways.

- Nine, terminals can be used to access airport runways and airplanes.

RECENT CRIMINAL ACTIVITY AT JIA

[13.](#) (SBU) A Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) official told Econoff that on September 5, armed robbers by-passed security at the domestic terminal and stole cash from an airport restaurant. The event went unpublicized for a week until a local journalist learned of the robbery. The heist is disconcerting because it reveals that armed thieves were able to enter the terminal, pass a police post, go up to the second level, rob the restaurant, return and drive the one-kilometer road off the airport premises without being challenged by security.

[14.](#) (SBU) The week of September 18, criminals broke into the airport ticket offices of British Airways (BA) and stole a safe from the offices of its handling company, Swissport.

[15.](#) (SBU) A senior airline executive told Econoff that on September 15, police confronted a suspicious individual

attempting to enter "Charlie" gate using bogus credentials. As they questioned the suspect, five of his associates opened fire from a nearby vehicle, wounding a police officer.

16. (SBU) On September 16, thieves accessed the runway and opened fire on police officers escorting valuable cargo to a KLM flight bound for Amsterdam. Police returned fire, but the robbers escaped. Airport contacts told Post's Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officer that there was reason to believe the robbers received help from the inside. Security officials from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the airlines confirmed this with Econoff. They said that a chain securing the unused, airside construction gate was left unlocked and was used by the bandits during their get-away. The officials were unsure whether the robbers entered the restricted area through the construction gate, although one official speculates that they may have gained airside access much earlier from a different location. It is unknown whether this incident is connected to the September 15 shooting.

17. (SBU) The same day, a journalist from The Star newspaper reported that he was able to pass through a non-functional electric fence protecting the airside perimeter. A security official at the airport told Econoff that this fence only leads to the private hangar area adjacent to airside. He said that the reporter would have had to pass through a control point before actually accessing the tarmac.

18. (U) The journalist also reported that he observed a number of other security breaches around the airport. For instance, he saw unattended vehicles parked at the terminal; he observed people bypassing X-ray machines and metal detectors and accessing the airport's "sterile area" by passing through a door marked "Goods Only - No Person to Pass Here" despite the presence of a security guard; he walked unchallenged through the basement of the terminal where he could have potentially accessed the airport's power supply; he watched a person dressed in an airline uniform and carrying a package slip through the automatic exit door of the domestic arrivals "sterile" area as passengers exited despite the presence of security; he noted that the automatic exit door from the International Arrivals customs was apparently malfunctioning and remained in an open position; he drove unchallenged into the "Perishable Goods Cargo" area, simply waving at the security guard posted there; and he reported that he parked outside the airside perimeter fence at several prohibited locations without ever seeing a security patrol.

WHAT'S BEING DONE ABOUT IT?

19. (SBU) South African Police Services (SAPS) is leading the investigation into these incidents. An ACSA security executive told Econoff that SAPS is close to arresting several suspects believed to have been helping from the inside. Director Zuma, the SAPS Commander at JIA, also told Post's Regional Security Office that SAPS is planning to brief diplomatic officials in a meeting being organized by the Department of Foreign Affairs. A date for the meeting has not yet been set.

110. (SBU) Ironically, the incidents come just weeks after the Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA), South Africa's airport management firm, announced that it had installed 1,200 surveillance cameras and spent nearly R53 million (about \$8 million) on upgrading and replacing fences, barriers and access control gates throughout the airport. An ACSA official told Econoff that another R60 million will be spent by April 2005 to improve intrusion detection of JIA's 36 km fence, baggage-management systems, biometric and control room systems as well as the installation of a vehicle number plate recognitions system. He said that during his November 2004 trip to Transportation Security Administration facilities in the United States he will be looking to purchase proven, off-the-shelf systems in use at U.S. airports for immediate implementation at JIA.

111. (SBU) The ACSA official also said that the following precautions have been put in place since the KLM incident:

- Increased security staff to 150 guards 24/7.
- The National Intervention Unit (NIU), responsible for all medium to high-risk policing, and the Crime Combating Unit are escorting valuable cargo to and from aircraft in armored police vehicles.
- NIU and Combating Unit patrolling outer perimeter while visible policing guards inside the airport buildings.
- Rapid Response teams have been deployed throughout the airport premises.

- Armored vehicles are on the airport premises.
- Increased infrared surveillance.
- The old freight and construction gates have been welded shut.
- Marked and unmarked vehicles are patrolling all entry and exit points to the airport.

12. (SBU) In addition, the official said that 600 new police fresh from the academy will be assigned to JIA beginning in January 2005. They are currently being trained on aviation security. Over the next eighteen months a total of 1,700 new police officers will replace the three sub-contracted security firms currently patrolling the car park, the perimeter fence, and at the terminals.

13. (SBU) The official also told Econoff that he believes an "insider" is cooperating with journalists to point out weaknesses in airport security. He warned of more negative reports on airport security in the short-term, but said they represent a minimal threat.

FRAZER